

# Decade of Dedication

## Town Manager Marks 10 Years on the Job

By KEITH L. MARTIN

For a newcomer to Duxbury, there are a lot of sights to take in to fully appreciate the beauty of the town. Ten years ago, one such newcomer made his own maiden voyage, driving by Town Hall and making his way to Duxbury Beach before a job interview that would decide whether this would be a mere visit to the town or a place he'd bring his family to live.

continued on page 24

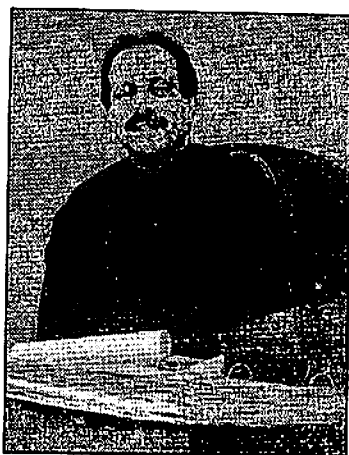
The man was Rocco Longo and the job interview was to become the town's second town manager, following in the footsteps of Tom Groux, who left to take a similar position in Chatham.

As he sat in the car, Longo thought about how regal Town Hall looked and how fortunate he would be to work there and how majestic the beach looked on that February day with the waters frozen over, knowing that this was a town he could call home.

"I just sat there and thought of how great it would be to come to Duxbury and how much I would love to work in this town," he said.

Fast forward to present time where Longo has occupied the town manager's role for a decade. While times and parts of Duxbury have changed, Longo's love for his job has not.

"The [ten years] have gone by fast, but I think I'm lucky because I love to get up in the morning and go to work and that's what is important," said Longo, 52.



The job - and desk - of a town manager is always full of things to do and Rocco Longo's is no exception.

"I'm not saying it's easy, but I work with good people, I am still challenged and there have been more positives than negatives after ten years," he said

### Getting Started

It was during his 1994 interview to become town manager that former selectman Margaret Kearney saw something unique in Longo.

"He wanted the job very much," she said. "He had this sense of fairness about him and a sense of compassion. He cared about people and those he worked with in the past and I was impressed by that."

Longo applied for the job as the chief executive officer of Pennsylvania-based Transitional Services, Inc., the state's largest residential rehabilitation provider for people with disabilities. Prior to that, he spent seven years in the public sector as the town administrator in Northborough, Mass.

"What I learned at that meeting was that things happen slowly. Town government has one speed and it ain't fast."



In this photo from 1994, Longo is sworn in by Town Clerk Nancy Oates at that year's Annual Town Meeting.

"After three years [in the public sector], I missed local government, but sometimes towns only hire someone who is a current town manager and I wasn't at the time," said Longo. "I had no idea what this town was like."

Although he was the only one of three finalists not to be living in the state, Longo was offered the job a few weeks

later and accepted in time to attend his first Annual Town Meeting, where he was officially sworn in.

"That was the meeting they were discussing adding nine holes to the North Hill golf course and it was interesting to hear the debate," he said. "What I learned at that meeting was that things happen slowly. Town government has one speed and it ain't fast."

Longo's attendance at the annual event was also his first introduction to someone he'd become very familiar with in the same setting for years to come, Town Moderator Allen Bornheimer.

"He struck me as really interested in the process [then] and has worked hard to make sure the town meeting process works and he really believes in it and that's important to me," said Bornheimer.

While he was just a spectator in 1994, since then Longo has been an active participant in Duxbury's annual gatherings, working for months on days of debate among citizens over budgetary and other town issues. This professional progression has not been lost on Bornheimer.

"I think [Rocco] has developed a confidence as he's gone along," he said. "He's gotten more proactive on the budget overview, doing several [presentations] before [Town Meeting]. He's very, very open about it...and if anyone has a question, he is there to answer and present the information."

Over his years as town manager, Longo still feels that

the meeting is a challenge in that you never know what to expect, but said he works hard to communicate to citizens through Little Town Meetings, the town's website and other outlets to get information to all residents.

He counts the creation of the Duxbury Free Library and Senior Center as two major Town Meeting victories during his tenure that can be looked at now with great pride.

"The result of all that work is that we have the best library and senior center in the Commonwealth," he said. "You can go to both of those buildings any day and see happy faces."

Getting to those happy faces at the library was not smooth sailing, however.

### Overcoming Challenges

Deborah Bornheimer, who headed the library project, has clashed publicly with Longo over the Duxbury Free Library several times during his tenure. In a written statement last week to the *Clipper*, Bornheimer said she has had "major disagreement...over what I've seen as his attempts to exert over the public library jurisdiction he does not have under the Town Manager Act."

Some of these attempts include expense authorization, a battle over alcohol at the gala opening and jurisdiction over library state and aid grants, Bornheimer said.

"I think these controversies impacted the employment climate in the run-up to library staff unionizing and contributed to an erosion of support for the library in recent budgets," she said.

She did, however, credit Longo for his support during the renovations.

"He gave me and the trustees an entirely free hand in the library construction project, which was a great trust," said Bornheimer.

Another somewhat unpleasant challenge for Longo was the \$1.3 million health insurance trust deficit the town faced last year.

"I feel a lot of that burden on my shoulders," he said. "If we didn't have a great board [of selectmen] and finance committee to work with, that could've been a challenge not addressed properly, but now we are on the right track."

Longo said that he wishes the town could've foreseen what was coming, but couldn't and that all those involved worked to find a solution, present it to citizens and get their approval at last year's Special Town Meeting and this year's Special within the Annual Town Meeting.

Selectman Andre Martecchini said that the situation crept up slowly on the town and that everyone, selectmen included, were "just not on top of it." He said that with the large amount of time Longo dedicates to running the town and the fact that it can be overwhelming, things like this tend to slip by. Once the problem was discovered, however, Martecchini said Longo was an important part in the solution.

"He and Betsy Sullivan organized our fiscal review team and have really been keeping an eye on this," he said. "[Rocco] has made a huge contribution and been right there with the team as they work."

## Then...and Now



Since Rocco Longo became Duxbury's second town manager in 1994, things have definitely changed in town. Here are a few examples:



1994	YEAR	2004
13,835	POPULATION	15,121
\$28.3 million	TOWN BUDGET	\$48.1 million
\$13.6 million	SCHOOL BUDGET	\$23.5 million
\$76,500	TOWN MANAGER SALARY	\$107,016*
\$17.82	TAX RATE	\$11.33
\$214,000	AVG. ASSESSED VALUE	\$510,333
\$3,813	AVG. TAX BILL	\$5,782
2,194	BUILDING PERMITS	1,955*
101	MARRIAGES	58*
\$525	NORTH HILL MEMBERSHIP	\$678

\*information based on 2003/FY03 data. North Hill membership is for single/resident. Assessed value is for single family home.

### A Team Atmosphere

The concept of teamwork is almost a mantra for Longo, not only in solving the health care deficit, but in all aspects of his work. Knowing that the wide range of his work, from dealing with town personnel issues to the everyday operation of town departments, can be challenging, Longo said that he never lets his guard down and stays energized for both himself, and those around him.

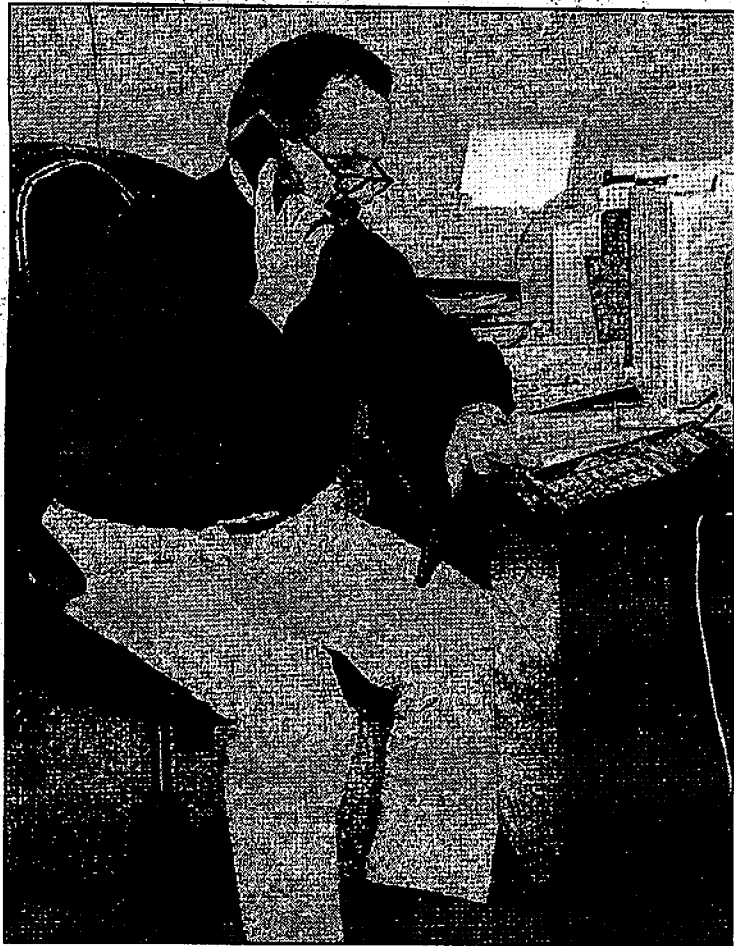
"Sometimes things happen in town government and to do certain things takes so long and people can lose faith," he said. "I really didn't have my own agenda when I came to Duxbury. I like to build consensus and follow the leadership of the board of selectmen and others."

Longo recognizes that his

busy time schedule does not allow him to manage by visiting each department on a daily basis, so he instead relies on department heads for information and interaction.

Kearney said that when Longo came to town he entered a "divisive management system" where everyone fended for themselves and protected their own interests.

"[Longo's] greatest accomplishment may be getting department heads to be part of a management team and he implemented department head meetings to make that happen," she said. "I've attended some of the workshops [he's held] on management skills for leaders and been so impressed by the knowledge shared among leaders."



**Stopping by Longo's office on any given day will find him talking to someone in person in his office or on the phone, with not much down time in between.**

Martecchini agrees.

"In his early years [as town manager], we still had some holdovers from our previous manager and with that was some friction," he said. "It can be difficult to instill in people the idea of working as a management team, but Rocco has done a good job in getting people to work together."

Current Selectman Betsy Sullivan first met Longo during her time on the school committee and said with this group, Longo reached out and included them in this team mentality.

"We were our own little world, but Rocco always looked at us as a team," she said. "I think his relationship with the schools is one of trust, so you can have open and frank conversations. With the selectmen, I know that I can ask him a question and trust him to get me an answer."

### Looking Ahead

After a decade of serving Duxbury, Longo looks forward to continuing the steps he's made from building teamwork to keeping the town as fiscally healthy as possible.

While he spends countless hours each week on town issues, Longo said he does not do his job for recognition, but instead simply likes to help people and gets to see the efforts of his and other town officials' work by just looking around him.

"At the local level of government, you see the result of your efforts and live it as a resident," he said. "I get recognition and support from the selectmen and as part of the community hear from people whether at work or being involved in the schools and local sports."

Longo said he prefers not to be the "focal point" in

town, but feels he is serving an important purpose in his role as town manager, even though decisions can't always make everyone happy.

As for the future of the town, Longo said that while any changes take time, he looks forward to seeing a new police station, continuing the success of remodeling town schools at the high school and implementing more affordable housing in town.

Regarding his own future, Longo said that he, wife Colleen and sons P.J. and Tyler are very happy on Lantern Lane and in the town and he would like to remain as town manager "as long as the selectmen and I feel I'm productive."

"If I had to retire here, I'd like to do that," he said. "I understand that it isn't always my call, however. As long as I feel I can contribute and keep a positive energy I want to stay."